

Show and tell

This year's *Tackling drugs week* saw agencies across the country showcasing their work. From photography to dance to football, **DDN** rounds up just some of the activities that took place.

From art to enforcement, the Home Office's annual *Tackling drugs week* gives agencies a chance to showcase their work and respond to community concerns about drugs. This year, organisations across the country mounted a huge range of events and activities.

Nottinghamshire DAT recruited sixth form students to watch a drug dog search at Nottingham Forest FC and report on what they saw, while Essex staged a football tournament at Colchester United with both service users and providers alongside local businesses. 'The football tournament was a fun way to break down barriers between members of the community and service users,' said Ben Hughes of EDAAT. 'An event like this demonstrates that recovering sufferers can work together with their neighbours and contribute a great deal to society.' Hampshire PRISM Network and Hampshire RFU, meanwhile, organised an all day tag rugby event involving the police, fire and versus service and local schools, among others.

Sussex DAATs organised Women's Institute visits to a local prison and drug treatment centre, as well as giving service users free photography lessons and disposable cameras to document their lives over 24 hours. Essex drug charity Open Road also displayed work from its photography and digital imaging courses – structured learning designed to bring vulnerable families together – with *Image Identity* featuring work by both parents and children. 'The project has provided an important opportunity for children and adults to learn together and focus on the positive aspects of family life,' said Peter Wanless, chief executive of the Big Lottery Fund, which provided grant support. 'The resulting images are really fantastic.'

Staying with artistic expression, award winning Bury St Edmunds based Artheads (*DDN*, 5 May 2008, page 8) used the week to screen a film to encourage more service users to get involved in the project, which allows people with substance misuse problems to express themselves through a range of artistic media. 'We want to be able to produce a continuous body of work where people can express their views about recovery,' said substance misuse coordinator at the West Suffolk Community Development Unit, Sammy Manzaroli, who runs the project. 'It shows that sufferers who are given the right help to

'What I like most about Positive Futures [above] is what they do for kids like us, taking people off the streets and making them see what else there is,' commented Emma from Basildon.

'Don't do drugs, they're just a drag! Get smart, get fit, get into tag!' Hampshire schoolchildren (below) get ready for tag rugby.



stop using drugs can contribute great things to society.'

London's Leicester Square, meanwhile, saw children's minister Baroness Morgan given lessons in street dance by young people from Positive Futures, while Southampton-based user magazine *Morphin'* produced its own *Tackling drugs* week special, focusing on treatment and the first person experiences of a range of service users.

A wide range of events in the North West included a football tournament between youth offender and DAAT teams and the opening of Salford Community Safety Unit's new Thomas Project residential facility, while Bolton saw a new web-based alcohol and cocaine awareness campaign and an information launch by Bolton Solidarity Community Association about the stimulant khat. A youth bus toured the Trafford area with drugs workers providing information, and there were also schools poster competitions.

The North East had a new treatment centre open in Newton Aycliffe, while HMP Durham held its first ever substance misuse market stall on site, bringing together prison and community teams to demonstrate services available in custody and on release, and attended by more than 200 people. Midlands events included a DrugScope-hosted conference in Birmingham, a 'You can recover' event in Coventry and a health walk in Nuneaton to reduce fear of crime.

On the enforcement front, Brighton saw Communities Against Drugs launch a campaign about reporting drug crime and delivering anonymous reporting cards to households, while in Yorkshire there was a crackdown on 'drug driving' routes from local nightclubs alongside roadshows at schools and supermarkets, a 'question time' event in Leeds and an information marquee in Sheffield city centre. Stockport staged an event to burn illegal drugs and scrap seized cannabis cultivating lamps while Wigan DAAT took the opportunity to relaunch its 'Rat on a rat' campaign, urging residents to shop drug-dealers on a free anonymous hotline.

Home Office minister Alan Campbell paid a visit to the Nottingham Trent University students whose awareness raising campaign on cocaine and cocaethylene was overall winner of this year's FRANK stakeholder awards (*DDN*, 15 June, page 14). 'The powerful campaign produced by the Nottingham Trent University students is a fantastic example of work to educate young people about the dangers of drugs to discourage them from getting involved, and the first prize was well deserved,' he said.

'National *Tackling drugs* week is about highlighting and promoting the work that goes on throughout the year in communities to reduce the harm caused by illegal substances,' he continued. 'I want to thank those who go that extra mile to tackle drug use, work tirelessly to bring to justice dealers who blight our communities, educate youngsters about the dangers of drugs and support friends and family of drug misusers in order to secure a positive future. I know that this work is making our communities safer and happier places in which to live and work. We can only do this through joint action between partners such as police forces, drug treatment agencies and local authorities which combine tough enforcement, treatment and awareness campaigns for the benefit of everyone.'

Attempts at raising awareness in Gloucester, however, were upstaged by a timely reminder of media priorities. 'As a group of us were running a public information and awareness stand in one part of Stroud, a Mr P Doherty was up in front of local magistrates on charges of drink driving and class A possession following his gig at Gloucester Guildhall,' says Alison Hustwitt of Gloucestershire DAAT. 'Guess what got all the publicity?' **DDN**

Post-its from Practice

A weighty issue

Food addiction can easily go unrecognised, says Dr Chris Ford



I was beginning to wonder what was in the air when a fourth person came into surgery on the same day wanting to talk about their eating. They were all very different but with one thing in common – varying degrees of food addiction.

The first patient was Isha, a 39-year-old Asian woman who had come for her monthly weigh-in. She had attended OA (Overeaters Anonymous) for many years and found it helpful but her weight had remained high. For the past four months she had moved to OA HOW (honest open-minded and willing to listen) which offers compulsive overeater 12-steppers a programme of recovery with a disciplined and structured approach. Now four stone down, fitter and more content than she had ever been, it certainly seemed to be the right approach for her.

Second in was Tom, a 45-year-old single parent receiving drug treatment from us, who was celebrating the loss of his third stone. We had been trying to get him to address his enormous increase in weight since stopping street drugs and taking over the care of his daughter, but he hadn't been able to change until he began a new relationship. Before this his diet had consisted mainly of packets of biscuits and fizzy drinks. I explained about sugar addiction and cross-addiction and advised him to stop all sugar and fizzy drinks, and get exercising. He was amazed how much better he felt and how the weight fell off.

Next there was Fred for a BP check and a chat about his progress. He was excited having reached his target Body Mass Index (BMI) of 23. He had been morbidly obese (BMI of 45) when I had first seen him for knee pain about twelve months previously. As a builder, his knees were greatly interfering with his work. X-rays showed signs of wear and tear and I advised him that losing weight was the best way forward. He

agreed, but had tried endless diets and experienced the frustration of weight loss and then weight gain. We discussed options and he decided to try a medically approved very low carbohydrate diet and a group therapy programme. These programmes recognise that losing weight is not enough, that it is essential to attend groups to work on the origins of your obesity and continue to attend and address the causes of your eating.

Lastly on that day came Alice who had realised through counseling that the origins of her overweight were about protection from family issues – she had been using her weight as a defence from the world. With this realisation the weight began to fall off. She felt 'groups' were not for her and used counseling and several websites which provided calorie and nutritional advice.

Food addiction is an under-recognised condition resulting in the compulsive, excessive craving for, and consumption of, food. It is not only manifested by the abnormal intake of food, but the intake and craving for foods that are, in themselves, harmful to the individual. People become physiologically and mentally dependent upon food. Overcoming an addiction to food can be very frustrating and disheartening – because unlike addiction to alcohol or drugs, you can't abstain. 'Food addicts' come from all age, race, and gender groups. The four above were overweight, but food addicts can be underweight or normal weight. There is no single or easy way to combat food addiction and it requires intense discipline in modifying eating patterns and lifestyle, along with an exercise program. Diets alone rarely have long-term success – people need to find the solution for them and we need to support people to find their way.

All these patients had a similar problem – food addiction – but all had come up with individual solutions and will need to continue to work on their problems.

Dr Chris Ford is a GP at Lonsdale Medical Centre and clinical director for SMMGP

To become a member of SMMGP visit www.smmgp.org.uk where you can also receive bi-monthly clinical and policy updates and be consulted on important topics in the field.